



# Herstory II

*profiles of eight more Ulster-Scots Women*



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## Introduction

'Herstory', a term adopted over forty years ago by feminist critics of conventionally written history, is history written from a feminist perspective, emphasizing the role of women, or told from a woman's point of view. *The Oxford English Dictionary* credits Robin Morgan with coining the term in her book entitled *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970).

The word is arrived at by changing the initial *his* in history to *her*, as if history were derived from *his* + *story*. Actually the word history was coined by Herodotus, 'the father of history', and is derived from the ancient Greek word, *στορία* (*historía*), meaning 'inquiry or knowledge acquired by investigation'. In Homer's writings, a *histor* is one who reports, having made a thorough investigation of the facts. The word has absolutely nothing to do with the male possessive pronoun. The term was apparently intended to be both serious and comic.

This publication aspires to examine the lives of eight interesting and significant Ulster-Scots women and their role in history in a wholly serious fashion. By definition, the lives of these women are far from typical of the women of their respective eras. They are quite exceptional women.

## Martha McTier

(née Drennan) ~ c.1743 - 1837

Martha McTier was a sister of Dr William Drennan, the true originator of the United Irishmen rather than Wolfe Tone, and knew many of her brother's friends. Her husband, the good-natured, easy-going Samuel McTier, a Chandler whom she married in 1773, was President of the First Belfast Society of United Irishmen. She was a formidably well-read and highly articulate woman. The Revd Thomas Drennan, her father had been the Minister of the First Belfast Presbyterian church in Rosemary Street, the wealthiest and most liberal Dissenting congregation in Ulster, and the friend and assistant of Francis Hutcheson, the Saintfield-born philosopher, Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow and 'Father of the Scottish Enlightenment'. She inherited her father's sharp intellect. She was regarded by the authorities as 'a violent republican', 'violent' being a synonym for 'fervent', 'committed' or 'convinced' and 'republican' in this context meaning 'a radical democrat'. While her brother was a 'republican' in the sense that he had a preference for a republican system of government over a monarchical one, Mrs McTier, while in most respects as radical as her brother, was not ideologically a strict republican. She was a prolific letter writer. At the time



her letters were of sufficient interest to the authorities that they were regularly intercepted and closely scrutinized. Friends, on the other hand, transcribed them and, like dissidents in the former Soviet Union and in the Eastern Bloc, passed them round almost like *samizdat* texts. Since then the correspondence has provided historians and the general reader with a rich and fascinating political and social commentary on life in Ulster, and especially in Belfast, between 1776, when the Drennan-McTier correspondence begins, and 1819, when it draws to a close with Dr Drennan's impending death.

Both brother and sister were deeply immersed in politics, philosophy, literature, drama and poetry. Drennan recommended Choderlos de Laclos' epistolary novel *Liasons dangereuses* to his sister: 'it is a most masterly piece of dangerous seduction in style and sentiment'. Given the close intellectual ties between Glasgow and Belfast, they were familiar with the work generated by the Scottish Enlightenment but both disliked the philosopher and historian David Hume on account of his atheism. They were also familiar with the French *philosophes*. Drennan thought Rousseau's scandalous *Confessions* should be read by 'none but men or very learned ladies'. Martha was less than impressed by Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, another epistolary novel. The best-selling novel of the eighteenth century, readers wrote to

Rousseau describing their 'tears', 'sighs', 'torments', and 'ecstasies'. As far as Martha was concerned: 'It has its beauties no doubt but as for touching my heart or interesting it, there is but one letter in the whole collection which touched mine'. Brother and sister also disagreed over William Goodwin's *Memoirs of the Author of 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman'* with its frank account of Mary Wollstonecraft's unconventional sexual behavior. Drennan teasingly suggested that the book was worth its price of four shillings for the print of the rather fetching Miss Wollstonecraft alone. Martha denounced it as 'a coarse, ill-written catch-penny'. She would not have been alone in regarding Goodwin's account of Wollstonecraft's close friendship with a woman, her love affairs, her illegitimate child, her suicide attempts and her agonizing death as either immoral or in bad taste.

Martha McTier's life was punctuated by tragedy. In 1789 she suffered a nervous breakdown from which she only recovered in 1792. In June 1795 Samuel died near Inverary while they were on holiday in Scotland. Samuel died without leaving a will and Martha lost a legal battle with her brother-in-law for the rights to her own house. She was obliged to rely on the assistance of her family during her long widowhood. Martha died on 3 October 1837, in the early months of the reign of Queen Victoria, having become completely blind, a cruel blow



for a voracious reader. At the time of her death she was in her 90s and may have been the oldest person in Belfast.

As the correspondence more than amply demonstrates, Martha was very close to her intellectually-gifted younger brother. Being childless, she focused all her hopes and ambitions on him. She was

constantly solicitous about his welfare and offered him sound advice, often unsolicited as sisterly advice often is. At a fairly mundane level, for example, she advised William: 'You do not wear your fine cravats in the right way; to show them to advantage they ought not to be folded in plasters, but put round the neck as you would tie a pocket handkerchief in a wisp.' William occasionally offered her advice. Martha relished cards and William warned not to play for too high stakes. Eventually, despite her 'New Light' Presbyterian heritage, she was to forsake the card-table to attend evangelical meetings where, after the address, fruit and wine were saved.

In 1793 William had been briefly engaged to Sarah Swanwick, a young Shropshire woman fifteen or sixteen years his junior. The only reason they did not marry was that William's medical practice was generating insufficient income (largely because

of his radical opinions) to support a wife and family. William never ceased to regret not marrying Sarah. In 1799 Martha persuaded him to visit Sarah in England and in 1800 they married. They were very happy and had four children.

Martha found the newly-married couple a succession of paying guests to keep them afloat financially. Martha also persuaded Martha Young, a wealthy cousin who died in 1807, to leave her fortune to William.

William Drennan's granddaughter and great-granddaughter, Mrs Ruth Duffin and Miss Ruth Duffin, were responsible for the preservation and organization of the correspondence. D.A. Chart, the first Deputy Keeper of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), edited a selection of the Drennan Letters which appeared in 1931. More recently, in 1999, Jean Agnew edited a complete edition, entitled *The Drennan-McTier Letters 1776-1820*, in three substantial volumes. As there were few areas of life which escaped Martha's attention, Jean Agnew's description of them as offering 'a unique window' on the social and political life of late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Ireland cannot be dismissed as hyperbole.

*Martha Maria Magee*  
(née Stewart) ~ c.1755 – 1846

Magee College, named after the College's nineteenth-century Ulster-Scots benefactress, is home to the Institute of Ulster Scots Studies, founded in 2001 to explore and research Ulster-Scots history and culture.

Martha Maria Stewart was born in Lurgan, County Armagh, about 1755. In 1780 she married the recently ordained Revd William Magee, the Presbyterian Minister of First Lurgan, who died on 9 July 1800. His death left her and her two sons in extremely straightened financial circumstances and dependant on the Presbyterian Widow's Fund.

Her two sons followed military careers, one entering the army as an ensign, the other as a surgeon. Both died in early manhood, one from an accident and the other from contracting rabies while serving in India.

Her two brothers also followed successful military careers, both attaining the rank of colonel. Both amassed substantial fortunes during the course of their careers. Their deaths transformed her financial circumstances. She moved to Dublin but continued to live frugally. She devoted her energies and new-found wealth to Presbyterian good causes. She died in Dublin on 22 June 1846.

Mrs Magee left her very substantial wealth to a variety of Presbyterian charities. The Irish Presbyterian Mission to

India received £25,000, Foreign Mission was given £5,000 and another £5,000 to Usher's Quay Female Orphans' School in Dublin. The new Presbyterian Church on Ormond Quay in Dublin, to which she had already contributed handsomely, received a further £1,350. She also left a £20,000 bequest to establish and endow a theological institution in Ireland to prepare students for the Presbyterian ministry.

This bequest proved contentious, giving rise to protracted rows between the Presbyterian General Assembly and the Trustees. Should the College be based in Belfast or Londonderry? What relationship, if any, should the College have with Peel's new Queen's College in the process of being established in Belfast? Should the College be a purely Presbyterian institution or should it be open to all denominations? On these issues the views of the Trustees prevailed. A site at Northland Row was provided by the city of Londonderry. There was agreement that the institution should be independent of the new Queen's College. Despite the donor's intentions to establish a theological institution, the College accepted students of all denominations to study a variety of subjects from the very outset. Located in an elegant Gothic building (designed by the Dublin architect



E. P. Gibbon and built, on the expressed wish of the Trustees, in Scottish sandstone), Magee College belatedly opened its doors to the first students in 1865, almost twenty years after Mrs Magee's death.

Exactly a century later Magee College generated fresh controversy. On 10 February 1965 the Lockwood Committee on Higher Education in Northern Ireland, the equivalent of the Robbins Committee (1963) on the mainland, revealed that Northern Ireland was to have a second university which would be sited at Coleraine, County Londonderry, rather than at *Magee University College*, as the institution was now called. This was an affront to local pride in Londonderry because local people expected Magee to form the nucleus of the new seat of learning. Actually Sir John Lockwood, the Master of Birbeck College, the chairman of the Committee and an international authority on the establishment of new universities, and his fellow Committee members had serious misgivings about the suitability of the Magee site (not least the lack of dynamism among the teaching staff and their lack of vision) as perusal of Committee's minutes demonstrate. The minutes also demonstrate that Lockwood paid very careful attention to the factors which the University Grants Committee took into consideration in making its decisions in Great Britain. One of the criteria which the Committee considered was the provision

of lodgings and accommodation for students. Coleraine, by virtue of its close proximity to the seaside resorts of Portrush and Portstewart, was deemed to be ahead of Magee in this respect. The Committee viewed the creation of expensive halls of residence as an unfortunate drain on capital which might otherwise be invested in educational facilities. Furthermore, the newly-created universities in Great Britain tended to be located on green-field sites (as was, indeed, University College Dublin). Finally, it is not generally appreciated that Armagh, which has had aspirations to be the seat of a university since at least the eighteenth century, and the new city of Craigavon were also considered as possible sites and that the Lockwood Committee believed Armagh's bid had greater substance than Magee's.

Had Mrs Magee realized how troublesome her generous legacy would prove to be she might have chosen to bequeath her wealth in a different fashion.

## Sarah Leech

1809 - c. 1830

The daughter of a linen weaver, Sarah was born Ballylennan, near Raphoe, County Donegal, and is one of the few published women writers in the Ulster-Scots tradition of that era. Beyond the biographical account contained in her only published collection, *Poems on Various Subjects* (1828), very little more is known about her. Although there is a general acceptance that she died tragically young, we do not know exactly when she died.

Her father, Thomas Leech, died of pleurisy when she was three. His death left his widow and six children in straitened circumstances. Sarah was taught to read by her eldest sister and in 1815 she began her formal education at the local school. She was of shy and retiring disposition and, furthermore, she was afraid of the teacher. She believed that there was 'something terrific (frightening) in his countenance'. Sarah's mother had to threaten her with a rod to go to school. It was erroneously assumed by the master and her friends that she had 'an aversion to learning'. Nothing could have been further from the truth. She attended the school for three months before it was closed down, suggesting perhaps that Sarah's assessment of the teacher was indeed correct. More importantly, during



the brief period that she attended the school her academic progress was astounding because she was able to read a chapter in the Bible and seemed to have a perfect grasp of what she had read.

Her intellectual curiosity was such that she read voraciously such books as 'chance threw in her way' and demonstrated an impressive capacity to absorb and process what she read. A kindly member of a local family took a benign interest in her welfare and he provided her with books, which he believed would be 'serviceable in expanding her ideas' and give her 'a correct knowledge of true religion'. He was not to be disappointed in this respect because her deep-seated Protestant faith was to be strongly evidenced in her poetry.

When she was twelve she briefly received instruction in writing but out of economic necessity she left school in 1821. She contributed to family finances by 'submitting to the drudgery of a spinning wheel' and proved to be a very able and skilful spinner.

In 1822 the family moved from Ballylennan to Lettergull, her mother's home place, half-a-mile-away. In 1825 we know she composed some satirical stanzas about a neighbour.

Sarah was fond of solitude, had an acute appreciation of nature (especially wild flowers) and enjoyed country walks. She

composed poetry in her head but did not commit it to paper. However, having a retentive memory, she had no difficulty in recalling her compositions. Whereas she had committed the poetry composed at Ballylennan to memory, she started writing poetry at Lettergull.

Around this period, she composed her 'Elegy on a Loquacious Old Woman'. This poem was widely admired throughout the neighbourhood and came to the attention of a gentleman visiting east Donegal. Impressed by what had heard, he made a point of visiting Sarah, finding her 'busily plying her spinning wheel in [her] humble cabin' and prevailed on her to recite her elegy for him. He transcribed it and a number of her poems and they appeared in the *Londonderry Journal* with 'some remarks on her humble situation in life'.

In 1826 she became aware that she was going blind and one evening she pulled the bandage off her eyes, and wrote 'Resignation Under Affliction'. The poem is accompanied by explanatory note: 'Written when the author was in danger of losing her sight, had no hopes of recovery.'

*Poems on Various Subjects* by Sarah Leech appeared in 1828. Sarah's poetry ranges over many subjects. An interest in what might be termed current affairs may be discerned. She writes about the human condition, as poets do. She explores

the torments of love. She writes about the world of fairies, a world which she views as wicked and malevolent. Her staunch unionism and Protestantism are evidenced by poems such as 'The Brunswick Clubs' and 'Progress of the Reformation'. 'On the Killing of a Mouse in Harvest' compares very favourably with Burns' 'To a Mouse'. Sarah's 'weaver poetry' is genuinely impressive and unfortunately undervalued. Happily, in 2006 Celine McGlynn and Dr Pauline Holland edited a collection of Sarah Leech's poetry, making her accessible to new and wider audiences. This may prompt a long overdue and comprehensive re-evaluation of Sarah's work. Dr Holland observes:

*The entire body of Leech's poetry is written in the repeated drumbeat of the iambic foot, and we can almost hear the treadle of the spinning wheel when we read her work aloud. Just as insistent are the nuances of Ulster-Scots life – the emphasis on work, the dour thrift, the loyalties and the enmities, the rhythms of the farming year, the unshakeable faith, and the dry, wicked humour.*

*Cecil Frances Alexander*  
(née Humphreys) ~ 1818-1895

Although the celebrated hymn-writer was born in Dublin, Cecil Frances Alexander spent the greater part of her life in north-west Ulster in the Diocese of Derry and Raphoe, living in Strabane between 1833 and 1850 and 1860 and 1867, in Castlederg between 1850 and 1855, in Upper Fahan between 1855 and 1860, and in Londonderry between 1867 and 1895. She may not have been an Ulster-Scot by some criteria but she certainly married an Ulster-Scot and she wrote the 'Legend of Stumpie's Brae', a ballad in Ulster-Scots which won the admiration of Lord Tennyson.

Cecil Frances Humphreys was the daughter of Major John Humphreys, formerly of the Royal Marines, and his wife, Elizabeth Reed. Major John Humphreys was land-agent to 4th Earl of Wicklow up to 1833 and to the 2nd Marquess of Abercorn thereafter.

She began writing verse in her childhood and, in collaboration with Lady Harriet Howard, daughter of the Earl of Wicklow, she produced a number of religious tracts. These were initially published separately but were published subsequently as a



compilation in 1848. Her religious work was strongly influenced by her contacts with the High Church Oxford Movement (or Tractarians) and in particular with John Keble, the English poet and one of the leaders of the movement. It was his famous Assize Sermon on 'National Apostasy' in Oxford in 1833, prompted by the Whig government's suppression of ten Church of Ireland bishoprics, which gave rise to the movement. She became friendly with Keble who is often credited with editing her *Songs for Little Children* but there is no obvious evidence that his role went beyond contributing a brief introduction. *Her Verses for Holy Seasons* (1846) was intended as a children's version of Keble's *The Christian Year* (1827). She dedicated the publication to Keble but did not mention him by name:

*To the author of The Christian Year, this attempt to adapt the great principles of his immortal work to the exigencies of the schoolroom, is inscribed with feelings of reverence and respect by one of the many thousands who have profited by his labours.*

By the 1840s she was well known as a hymn writer and her compositions were appearing in Church of Ireland hymnals. In 1848 *Hymns for Little Children* was published. The book was intended to explain the content of 'The Apostles' Creed' by answering the very obvious but searching questions which children often ask. For example, 'Where was Jesus born?' was

answered by 'Once in royal David's city'. The answer to 'Why did He have to die?' was provided by 'There is a green hill far away'. Her response to 'Who made the world?' was 'All things bright and beautiful'. The book reached its sixty-ninth edition before the close of the nineteenth century. These hymns remain three of the most popular hymns in the English language.

In October 1850 she married William Alexander, an Anglican clergyman, who became Bishop of Derry and Raphoe in 1867 and Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland in 1896. His family was greatly perturbed that his bride was six years older than the groom. This is why Mrs Alexander's date of birth has appeared in some older works of reference as 1823. In most cases it has since been silently corrected.

She was an indefatigable visitor to the poor and the sick and heavily involved in charitable work. Money from her first publication had helped build the Derry and Raphoe Diocesan Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, which was founded in 1846 in Strabane. The profits from *Hymns for Little Children* were donated to the school.

She wrote 'Jesus calls us o'er the tumult' while she was at Termnamongan, near Castlederg. It first appeared in *Narrative Hymns for Village Schools* (1853).

On 1 January 1871, as the result of W. E. Gladstone's Irish Church

Act of 1869, the Church of Ireland ceased to be the Established Church in Ireland. She penned a somber hymn, which is not one of her better known hymns, to mark what for the membership of Church of Ireland was a traumatic occasion:

*Dimly dawns the New Year on a churchless nation,  
Ammon and Amalek tread our borders down.*

For the Alexanders the hurt would have been all the greater because Gladstone was a High Churchman who would have shared their theological perspectives.

In 1889, at the request of H. H. Dickinson, Dean of the Chapel Royal at Dublin Castle, she produced an English version of a Gaelic poem entitled 'St. Patrick's Breastplate' found in the *Liber Hymnorum*. The hymn is also known by its opening line: 'I bind unto myself today'. It is currently included in the *English Hymnal*, the *Irish Church Hymnal* and *The Hymnal of the American Episcopal Church*.

Mrs C. F. Alexander occupies an honoured place in the folklore of the Apprentice Boys of Derry. In 1870 Gladstone's Liberal government sought to prevent the annual burning of Lundy in effigy on 18 December of that year. Oral tradition credits Mrs Alexander with hiding the effigy of 'the traitor Lundy' in the Bishop's Palace and the Bishop with refusing the police permission to search the palace, thus, enabling the celebration

to take place in defiance of the wishes of the authorities. The Bishop and Mrs Alexander's actions were almost certainly the product of their hostility to Gladstone's Irish Church Act. Bishop Alexander had made a very forceful speech in the House of Lords in June 1869 denouncing disestablishment. Mrs Alexander may also have been impressed by the epic proportions of the Siege of Derry because she wrote a poem on the subject. Bishop Alexander's unionism is evident in his reaction to disestablishment (which represented a clear breach of the Act of Union) and the speech which he made against Home Rule in the Royal Albert Hall at the time of the Second Home Rule Crisis in 1893.

She died at the Bishop's Palace in Londonderry on 12 October 1895 and is buried in the City Cemetery. A posthumous collection of her poems, edited by her husband, appeared in 1896.

Douglas Alexander MP, the former Secretary of State for International Development and current Shadow Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, and his sister Wendy Alexander, the former MSP and leader of the Scottish Labour Party, are Mrs C. F. Alexander's great-nephew and great-niece respectively.

There are two excellent biographies of the hymn writer: E.W.

God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.—GEN. 1. 31.

*ALL things bright and beautiful,  
All creatures great and small,  
All things wise and wonderful,  
The Lord God made them all.*

2 Each little flower that opens,  
Each little bird that sings,  
He made their glowing colours,  
He made their tiny wings:

3 The purple-headed mountain,  
The river running by,  
The sunset, and the morning  
That brightens up the sky:

4 The cold wind in the winter,  
The pleasant summer sun,  
The ripe fruits in the garden,  
He made them every one:

5 The tall trees in the greenwood,  
The meadows where we play  
The rushes, by the water,  
We gather every day:

6 He gave us eyes to see them,  
And lips that we might tell  
How great is God almighty,  
Who has made all things well: Amen.

**Hymn 600.** WILLIAM HENRY MONK, 1837.

ALL THINGS BRIGHT. 7 6 7 6. D.

UNISON.

All things bright and beau - ti - ful, All crea - tures great and small,

FIN.

All things wise and won - der - ful, The Lord God made them all.

HARMONY.

D.C.

A - men.

Lovell, *A Green Hill Far Away: A Life of Mrs C.F. Alexander* (1970) and Valerie Wallace, *Mrs Alexander* (1995).

*Margaret  
Montgomery Pirrie*  
(née Carlisle) ~ 1857-1935

Margaret Montgomery Pirrie was a well-educated, dynamic and energetic woman surrounded by but not over-awed by alpha males. The *Northern Whig* of 18 May 1921 described William James Pirrie, Margaret's husband, as 'not merely the greatest Irish industrialist of his day, but the greatest shipbuilder in the world'. Margaret's brother Alexander Carlisle was described as 'the greatest shipyard manager in Europe'. Two other brothers, Henry and John, founded a shipping company called the Blue Star Line in London. Margaret was not in awe of these high achievers because she had admirable qualities of her own and was able to demonstrate leadership of a very high order.

Margaret Pirrie was born 31 May 1857 and was a daughter of John Carlisle, who taught English at Belfast Academical Institution. Catherine Carlisle, her mother, was from Killead, County Antrim, and a sister of the mother of William James Pirrie. She married her first cousin on 17 April 1879. Although not yet 32, Pirrie was already a significant figure in Harland & Wolff and under his leadership Harland & Wolff would become the greatest shipyard in the world.



Probably because the marriage was childless, she took an unusual and exceptionally close interest in her husband's career. She accompanied him on business trips, visited the shipyard and familiarised herself with the yard's operation and the company's finances. Pirrie came to rely on her advice and judgement. On Pirrie's death, Margaret became Honorary President of Harland & Wolff.

Margaret was the most significant female philanthropist in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Belfast. Her name ought to be inextricably linked with the Royal Victoria Hospital. The RVH was built on a site granted by the Belfast Corporation to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 and to replace Belfast's general hospital.

Margaret raised £100,000 for the project in less than a year, of which William James Pirrie donated £5,000 and Margaret £2,000. W. J. Pirrie gave the Hospital a further £11,000 to enable the RVH to open free from debt. According to Richard Clarke in his history of the Hospital, there was an unfortunate incident at the opening by Edward VII in 1903. The King, paying tribute to W. J. Pirrie, observed: 'And so, Mr Pirrie, this significant building is your great work.' Pirrie bowed modestly but someone rudely, albeit accurately, interjected: 'Yes, his wife collected the money.'



The RVH was the first public building in the world to have air-conditioning, technology pioneered by Belfast's Sirocco Works.

Margaret then raised a further £100,000 to endow the hospital, to meet running costs

and to allow for expansion. Margaret chaired both the Ladies Committee and the Nursing Committee. She was President of the Hospital until her death, recognition of her role as the Hospital's most important benefactor.

Before Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule at the end of 1885 W. J. Pirrie was a Liberal. He then became a Liberal Unionist (a Liberal opposed Home Rule). However, in the first decade of the twentieth century he reverted to Liberalism and became a Home Ruler and was a prime mover in the establishment of the Ulster Liberal Association in April 1906.

By the end of the second decade of the twentieth century Pirrie had abandoned both Liberalism and support for Home Rule. His

acute political antennae informed him that both represented the past rather than the future. The rebellion in Dublin in 1916 played a significant part in his return to Unionism but the exact role which Margaret played in his changing political allegiances is unclear. However, when her husband was Lord Mayor of Belfast (in 1896 and 1897) the Marquess of Dufferin and Ava described Margaret as 'the most charming and most popular lady mayoress who ever sceptered a city or disciplined a husband'. This observation may well be rather more than a conventionally-crafted polite tribute.

Margaret Pirrie broke new ground in a number of areas of public life. In 1904 she became the first woman to be made an honorary burgess of Belfast. In 1922 she became the first female Justice of the Peace in Belfast. Four years later she became an honorary member of the Belfast Chamber of Commerce.

As her influence was largely exerted through her husband, after his death at sea of pneumonia (off the coast of Cuba) on 7 June 1924, it declined markedly. Although Lady Pirrie became Honorary President of Harland & Wolff, she conspicuously failed to see eye-to-eye with Sir Owen Phillips who succeeded her late husband as chairman of Harland & Wolff. Sir Owen's management style was radically different to Lord Pirrie's

unfortunate compulsion to micromanage everything. Sir Owen, rightly or wrongly, believed that he had inherited a chaotic mess, a viewpoint not likely to endear him to Lady Pirrie who was a zealous guardian of her husband's reputation.

When she died in London on 19 June 1935, there was unanimous acknowledgement of her widespread and benign influence in so many fields of endeavour: industry, philanthropy, the social services, learning and the arts. There are portraits of both Lord and Lady Pirrie in the Reception Room in Belfast City Hall.

*Rose Maud Young*  
(*Róis Ní Ógáin*) ~ 1865 - 1947

Rose Maud Young, Ada McNeill, Margaret Dobbs and Margaret Hutton were the leading lights of a remarkable coterie of women deeply interested in the Irish language and culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. They were instrumental in establishing *Feis na nGleann* in 1904. They all came from Protestant, unionist and Ulster-Scots backgrounds and, except for Margaret Hutton, lived in mid Antrim

For example, Ada McNeill was a first cousin of Ronald McNeill, the Unionist MP, historian of Unionism and future Lord Cushendun. She was besotted with Roger Casement but her love, for obvious reasons, was not reciprocated. While Young, Dobbs and Hutton remained unionists, Ada McNeill became an ardent separatist.

Margaret Dobbs' brother James was one of the Larne gurunners. Her father was High Sheriff of Carrickfergus and County Louth and a Justice of the Peace in County Antrim. She fell in love with the language through listening to her Gaelic-speaking Scottish nurse. Like Ada McNeill, she was rather



fond of Roger Casement but she did not admire his judgement. It was her contention: 'Ireland is a closed book to those who do not know her language. No one can know Ireland properly until one knows the language. Her treasures are as hidden as a book unopened'.

Margaret Hutton, the wife of a Belfast industrialist, translated the *Táin* into English and was a close friend of Patrick Pearse. He stayed at her Deramore Park home during his visit in Belfast in 1904 and she generously donated £50 to *Scoil Eanna*, Pearse's bi-lingual school in Dublin. However, she did not share his vision of a Gaelic-speaking Irish state.

Rose Young's brother George was the Orange County Grand Master of Antrim and the Unionist MP for Bannside in the Northern Ireland House of Commons. He listed his interests in *Who's Who* as 'politics, Orangeism and the Special Constabulary'.

Rose Young was born 30 October 1865 at Galgorm Castle. She was the seventh of the twelve children of John Young and Grace Charlotte Savage of Galgorm House, Ballymena. John Young was the Managing Director of the Braidwater Spinning Company and a philanthropist, a Presbyterian and a convinced unionist. He was the first Presbyterian to be appointed to the Irish Privy Council. At the Presbyterian Anti-Home

Rule Convention in February 1912 the Rt Hon. John Young described the Presbyterian community in Ulster as a 'Scottish colony' enjoying in the Parliament of the United Kingdom 'civil and religious liberty such as was enjoyed in no other part of the world'.

Rose entered Cambridge Training College in 1899 with a view to becoming a teacher. She was briefly a governess. In 1903 she joined the Gaelic League in London and attended classes there. However, her interest in the language significantly predates this because in 1889 she had visited William Reeves, the Bishop of Down & Connor & Dromore, to view some Gaelic manuscripts which he had recently purchased and in 1891 she twice visited the Bodleian Library at Oxford to examine Gaelic manuscripts. Her interest in the Irish language is often attributed to her friendship with Dr Reeves, who, in addition to being a Church of Ireland bishop, was a scholar and one-time principal of the Diocesan School in Ballymena (now Ballymena Academy), and this may indeed be so. In 1904 she was one of the founders of *Feis na nGleann*. The first *Feis*, which attracted 2,000 people, was held at Glenariff. The following year the *Feis* was held in Cushendun. In 1907 and 1908 she travelled regularly to Belfast to attend Seán Ó Catháin's classes at *Coláiste Chomhgaill* on the Falls Road. In 1909 she went with Ada McNeill to study the language at *Caisal na gCorr* in County Donegal.

Rose Young was a great diarist and one of the striking features of her diary is the way in which she moved effortlessly between the worlds of Unionism and Irish language and culture, worlds which many today would regard as mutually incompatible. For example, on 7 December 1910 she recorded: 'Ballymena Unionist meeting. Colonel Rowan came for the night to go to it. Captain O'Neill and Lady O'Neill came to early dinner. I went with the whole party to the meeting.' Captain O'Neill was the Unionist MP for Mid Antrim, the first MP to be killed in the Great War and the father of Captain Terence O'Neill. Ten days later she recorded that she had been in Belfast to visit the Irish College. On 22 June 1911 she recorded a huge Coronation Day party at Galgorm and at the end of the month she wrote about the Glens Feis at Garron Tower. On 6 May 1935 she wrote about the celebration of King George V's Silver Jubilee and the next day she attended a meeting of the Glens *Feis* committee.

Although some *gealgoiri* fondly imagine that Rose Young was ostracised by her family on account of her interest in the Irish language, this view has been comprehensively refuted by Rosemary, the Dowager



Galgorm Castle, Co. Antrim.

Lady Brookeborough, her great-niece. Lady Brookeborough remembers her aunt as a frail old lady, visiting her regularly in Cushendun and Ballycastle and she in turn staying at Galgorm.

Rose Young's principal claim to fame is as the editor and compiler of a vast three-volume collection of Gaelic poetry called *Duanaire Gaedhilge*. The first volume appeared in 1921 and the other two were published in 1924 and 1930. Her friend Douglas Hyde, the founder of the Gaelic League, contributed an introduction (in Irish) to *Duanaire*, in which he observed: 'Róis Ní Ógáin has performed a valuable task. She has made available a collection of poems that are incomparable for their excellence and melodiousness'.

The quality of her scholarship was widely admired. Although much of the material was already in print, by bringing it together she made it accessible to a much wider audience. Furthermore, the work shaped and influenced the content of many Irish-language textbooks.

During the last sixteen years of her life she resided with her friend Margaret Dobbs. She is buried in the Presbyterian churchyard at Ahoghill.

## Lydia Mary Foster

(1867 – 1943)

It is absolutely impossible to predict with any certainty which authors who are popular today will still be read in, for example, the 2080s. In the 1930s Francis Brett Young wrote a series of novels which were ‘long, comfortable, charmingly-written and classically composed’. They were immensely popular and Brett Young was Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin’s favourite contemporary novelist because he waxed lyrical about ‘the same wholesome, consensual rural values’ in which the Prime Minister passionately believed. Although Brett Young’s work has some affinity with Radio Four’s *The Archers*, scarcely any one reads him today.

There is an analogy with Lydia Mary Foster. She published novels and short stories depicting the inhabitants of her native County Tyrone in the same era. Her work was very successful and popular in Ulster in 1930s and 1940s and even attracted approval in both London and Dublin. Today she is little read and is probably largely forgotten, except by a small but select band of enthusiasts and specialists, and the fact that the title of one of her books – *Tyrone among the Bushes* – has entered popular consciousness, without people necessarily appreciating its source.

Lydia Foster grew up a daughter of the manse



Newmills Presbyterian Church, Co. Tyrone.

at Newmills, near Coalisland. Her father the Revd James Foster was Minister of Newmills Presbyterian Church from 1850 to 1890. He was the third incumbent of that church and wrote an account of the 1859 Revival in Ulster which he welcomed ‘with open arms and entered into with joyous enthusiasm’. He was a friend of the Revd Dr Henry Cooke, ‘the Black Man’ whose statue stands in College Square in Belfast, his back pointedly turned to Royal Belfast Academical Institute (which Cooke looked upon with distain), and the foremost Presbyterian cleric of the nineteenth century. Indeed, when Foster received his ‘call’ to Newmills (an invitation to become minister of that congregation), Foster balked somewhat at the terms offered because there was no manse for him and only ‘a stipend of nineteen pounds for his support and encouragement’. He sought Cooke’s advice and was told to ‘take it and work the harder’.

Lydia Mary was the second daughter and the fourth of six children, and was named after her mother. Her eldest brother Nevin H. Foster was manager of the Hillsborough Linen Company. Highly regarded as an ornithologist and botanist, he contributed to ‘Nature Notes’ in the *Northern Whig*, the Liberal (and subsequently Liberal Unionist) counterpart to the Conservative *News Letter*.

Lydia and her elder sister Jane Wallace and younger sister Susan Margaret Elizabeth (Bessie) were probably educated at home and then at Miss Black's school in Holywood where they boarded during the week. Bessie attended Victoria College, Belfast, before entering to Trinity College, Dublin, where she matriculated in 1892 and from which she graduated in Ancient and Modern Languages in 1896.

There were few career opportunities for well-educated girls in a country village like Newmills, so after Bessie's graduation the three sisters established a private school, the Ladies' Collegiate School, Balmoral, in Belfast. The school began life in Myrtlefield Park, then moved to 434 Lisburn Road and finally to 16 Maryville Park. The school was mostly attended by local girls but it had also attracted some boarders who, with their teachers, attended Malone Presbyterian Church on Sundays and sat in Pew No. 21 in the gallery. A number of younger boys also attended the school.

The school flourished for twenty years until the death of Lydia's two sisters in the final years of the Great War. Bessie died on Christmas Day 1917 and Jane on 26 October of the following year. Lydia became increasingly deaf and turned to writing, publishing short stories, plays, verse and poetry in magazines such as *Ulster Parade*, a light-hearted collection of

Roughan Castle, Newmills, Co. Tyrone.



local writing, enough to provide her with a modest income to support her frugal lifestyle.

Lydia published several books: *The Bush that Burned* (1930), *Tyrone among the Bushes* (1933), *Manse Larks* (1936) and *Elders' Daughters* (1942). Lydia had long aspired to write about Newmills Presbyterian Church and life in that part of east Tyrone and *The Bush that Burned* was the realization of that dream. A best seller, one reviewer enthusiastically observed:

*We have been awaiting a novelist who knew Ulster life intimately and who could depict it with understanding and sympathy. The author of this novel is the author we have been eagerly expecting.*

*The Bush that Burned* even merited favourable mention in London journals, an accolade rarely accorded to local writing in that era. The Dublin-based *Irish Independent* perfectly accurately described it as a 'brilliant portrayal of Presbyterian life'. Dr John T. Carson notes that the book

*saw the funny side of things connected with the Presbyterian meeting house, such as the precentor's tuning fork, the long-handled collecting ladels, the old smokey coke stoves, the boots that*

*squeaked down the aisles on Sunday mornings and the romances that affected the heads of the daughters of the manse.*

While *Tyrone among the Bushes* is a collection of poetry and shorter pieces of prose, *Manse Larks* depicts the life in Newmills manse. If *Manse Larks* focused on the lives of the daughters of the manse, *Elders' Daughters*, her second substantial volume, endeavoured to perform the same service for 'elders' daughters', young women whom she understood perfectly and about whom she was equally well informed. *Elders' Daughters* was described as 'good . . . but hardly as fresh as the first'. Nevertheless, it was an immediate success.

She remained in Belfast, living at 16 Maryville Park until the early 1940s, latterly along with another single lady who was traumatised by the Belfast blitz in the spring of 1941. Foster herself, almost totally deaf and living several miles away from the raids' epicentre, took the raids completely in her stride. Dr Carson informs us:

*When the bombs began to fall the visitor's calm was shattered and she came near to panic. Lydia's deafness was an advantage and she took command of the situation. They took refuge under the dining-room table and in order to restore the shattered nerves of her companion Lydia read to her from the forty-sixth psalm.*

By the time Lydia was completing *Elders Daughters* she was

unwell and could scarcely hold her pen, so she dictated the concluding chapters to her niece at 'Hollowbridge', her niece's home near Hillsborough. Lydia died there on 13 December 1943 but she lived long enough to see two editions of *Elders Daughters* sell out before her death.

There is a short biography of James Foster of Newmills by Dr Carson, published by the Presbyterian Historical Society, which contains interesting material about Lydia and other family members and provides an excellent introduction to the life and work of Lydia Mary Foster. Two brief extracts from *Manse Larks* and one from *Elders' Daughters* appear in *The Ulster Anthology* edited by Patricia Craig (Belfast, 2006), which convey a flavour of Lydia Foster's writing.



Foster family burial plot,  
Newmills Presbyterian Church, Co. Tyrone.

*Monica de Wichfeld*  
*née Massy-Beresford ~ 1894 - 1945*

Monica Emily Massy-Beresford was born on 12 July 1894 in England and grew up at St Hubert's, on the shores of Upper Lough Erne in County Fermanagh. George Massy-Beresford, her father, was a landowner and an accomplished sportsman. Alice Mulholland, her mother, was a daughter of the Lord Dunleath. She was educated at home and attended a girls' school in Dresden for a year.

George Massy-Beresford was an enthusiastic yachtsman, building and racing his own yachts. It was a passion he shared with the other aristocratic and gentry families of the Erne basin. *The Times* in August 1904 reported that George Massy-Beresford's *Mistral* won a race organised by Lough Erne Yacht Club, founded in 1820 and sixth oldest yacht club in the British Isles, for the second year in a row. *The Times* also noted that *Mistral* had a crew of six, including the owner's ten-year old daughter.

Monica was clearly close to her father. In 1905, when she was eleven, Monica was allowed to drive his De Dietrich, the first motor car in that part of County Fermanagh.

Massy-Beresford was a leading light in the Ulster Volunteer Force in the years before the outbreak of the Great War.



In April 1914 Monica accompanied her father to Larne to collect part of the *Clyde Valley's* cargo for the Fermanagh volunteers. Mary Rodgers in *Prospect of Erne* (Belfast, 1967) records Patrick Gillespie's memories of Monica during the third Home Rule crisis:



*Miss Monica, she was a grand one! She often came with Mr George to morning parade and shooting practice ... indeed that young girl could hit the target at least as well as the others. Many times she had a hand in smuggling guns into here from England. She hid a couple in her skirts when she went through control in Belfast or Dublin.*

On 15 June 1916 she married Jorgen de Wichfeld, a Danish aristocrat and diplomat, and went to live at Engestoft where there was a lake 'that reminded her so much of Lough Erne and St Hubert's'. The couple had three children: Ivan (born 1919), Varinka Wichfeld-Muus (1922 - 2002) and Viggo (born 1924).

During the Second World War she was active in the Danish

Resistance. She began her involvement in the resistance by raising money for the underground press. She then assumed leadership of the resistance groups on the islands of Lolland and Falster (in south-east Denmark) until she was betrayed by a fellow resistance fighter captured by the Gestapo.

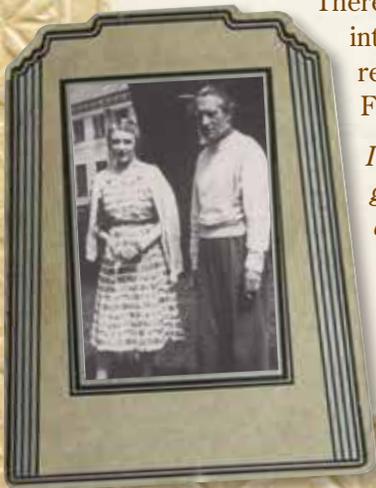
She did not break under Gestapo interrogation and was condemned to death in May 1944. The sentence caused uproar in Denmark because she was the first woman to be condemned to death in Denmark for many centuries.

Bowing to pressure, the German authorities commuted the sentence to life imprisonment and dispatched her to a concentration camp in Germany.

There she wrote a letter which was smuggled into a neighbouring cell. It reveals how restrictive and claustrophobic she found Fermanagh life:

*I always walked alone when I was a little girl; I set myself down on a rock in the lake, and dreamed of how I would make my way out of that poor country and that narrow*

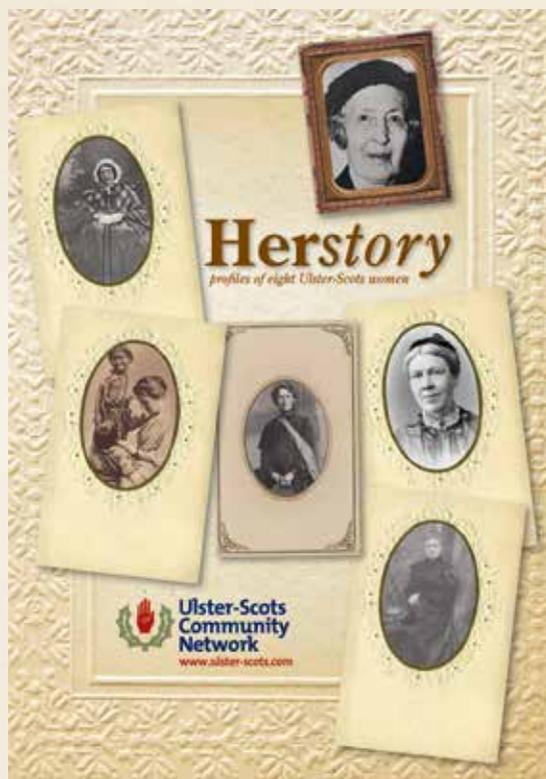
Monica pictured with her husband Jorgen de Wichfeld in 1943, shortly before her arrest by the Gestapo.



*circle to which I belonged. I wished to see other lands, to get to know other people, to live life.*

Although we might imagine that she inhabited a world of privilege as a girl, as a result of her father's eccentric ideas on raising children, she actually had a very Spartan upbringing. She was taught to show aversion to expressing any physical discomfort or pain. She was also very frugal where food and drink were concerned. These qualities may have served her well when she was interrogated by the Gestapo and in the concentration camp. However, she contracted pneumonia and died in Waldheim camp on 27 February 1945.

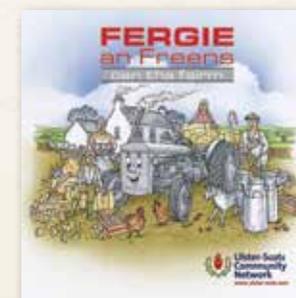
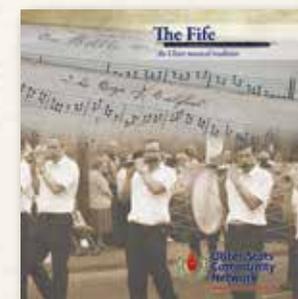
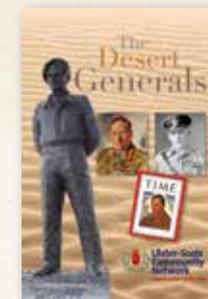
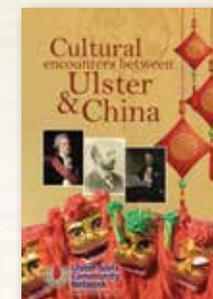
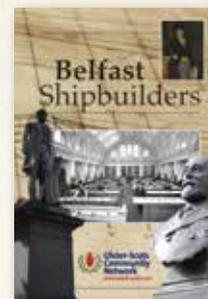
A memorial service was held for her in St Saviour's, London, on 12 April 1945. In Engestoft Church there is a sandstone memorial tablet with bronze script to Monica de Wichfeld. In Derrylin she is commemorated on the War Memorial in the Parish Church. In 1992 Christine Sutherland wrote an account of the life of Monica de Wichfeld entitled *Monica: Heroine of the Danish Resistance*.



## *Herstory*

The first edition of Herstory contains profiles of eight interesting Ulster-Scots women: Elizabeth Gray, Mary Ann McCracken, Margaret Byers, Isabella Tod, Amy Carmichael, Isabel Deane (Ida) Mitchell, Dehra Parker and Helen Waddell.

Other titles from the Ulster-Scots Community Network include:



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Margaret Montgomery Pirrie (*née Carlisle*) 1857 - 1935

Rose Maud Young 1865 - 1947

Mary Lydia Foster 1867 - 1943

Monica de Wichfeld (*née Massy Bereford*) 1894 -1945



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